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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 001073

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SUBJECT: TFH01: AMBASSADOR AND PRESIDENT ARIAS DISCUSS
HONDURAN CRISIS

TEGUCIGALP 00001073 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. (S) Summary: The Ambassador and President Arias discussed the Honduran crisis on October 21. They REVIEWED the temporary suspension of the talks. The Ambassador blamed the recent failure on the last minute intransigence of Roberto Micheletti. The Ambassador expressed the hope that both sides could come back with the good faith and political will necessary to secure agreement on the restitution question. President Arias discussed his conversation with President Zelaya on October 21. Arias suggested to Zelaya that both he and Micheletti consider resigning and allowing the creation of a government of national reconciliation to oversee the elections. He found Zelaya wrathfully taking an extremely tough line, completely obsessed with his return to power and seemingly uncaring about the welfare of the Honduran people and democracy. He said Zelaya had lashed out against the OAS and the U.S. Both agreed that Zelaya's threat to break off the dialogue, if a serious proposal was not on the table by Saturday, October 24 was a mistake; as was Zelaya's threat to boycott and direct his supporters in the Resistance to disrupt the elections. The Ambassador noted that if Zelaya attacked the elections he would lose the high ground and potentially be opposed by most Hondurans who wanted free and fair elections to take place on November 29. Both agreed on the need for the international community to maintain principled support for democracy and the constitutional order, but also encourage creative solutions to the crisis. End Summary.

12. (S) The Ambassador spoke with President Arias on the morning of October 22 and discussed the situation in Honduras and the status of negotiations. The Ambassador confirmed that negotiations were suspended, although neither side had formally walked out of the process and declared the dialogue at an end. The Ambassador told Arias that on the positive side, both delegations had achieved agreement on 95 percent of text for the San Jose/Guaymuras Accord. The Ambassador stressed that in fact, both delegations had reached complete agreement on the eight article text on the evening of October 15, but that regime leader Roberto Micheletti and his inner circle had pulled back from the agreement to send the Accord to the National Congress for its consideration. The Micheletti ploy to send the Accord to the Supreme Court was an effort to kill any possibility that it would be enacted. The Ambassador said

that we needed to keep the dialogue alive in some way and the agreed upon text ready to put back on the table if/when the political will resurfaced. If there was no movement in the next couple of days both sides needed to consider other creative ideas to try to move this forward.

13. (S) President Arias agreed and appreciated all of the support that the U.S. had provided the negotiating process and the OAS technical support mission. He said he had spoken to President Zelaya yesterday and had found him "very difficult and obstinate." Arias said he had gently broached the idea that if an agreement could not be found that Zelaya consider an option whereby both he and Micheletti would resign and a government of national reconciliation would be created to govern Honduras through the elections. Arias told Zelaya that he and Micheletti needed to be thinking of the welfare of the Honduran people, ways to save the future of Honduran democracy, and salvage its elections process. He (Arias) urged that both he and Micheletti needed to see beyond their own narrow personal interest. Arias stressed that Zelaya responded in a very angry manner. Zelaya said he would not/not renounce his claim to the Presidency and said that he had established a deadline that if a breakthrough proposal was not reached by Saturday, October 24, he would permanently withdraw from the dialogue process, announce his intention of boycotting the elections, and call on the entire community to not recognize the results of the elections. Zelaya warned that the elections would either not take place, or happen in a climate of strife and civil disobedience that would make the process completely illegitimate. Zelaya added that the OAS mission in Tegucigalpa had not been helpful and had been manipulated by the Micheletti regime. Arias noted ominously that Zelaya was not thinking rationally and had recklessly charged that he had evidence that the coup plot had been conceived in U.S.

TEGUCIGALP 00001073 002.2 OF 002

Southern Command.

14. (S) The Ambassador and Arias agreed that Zelaya was being influenced in a destructive way by radical elements that were co-habiting with him in the Brazilian Embassy. The Ambassador stressed that he made a point of speaking with Zelaya on a daily basis to counter the influence of these radical elements and balance the President's perspective. They also agreed that the personal feud between Micheletti and President Zelaya was blinding them to what was in the best interests of the Honduran people. Both concurred that if Zelaya attempted to derail the elections, he would lose much support within Honduras and in the international community. The Ambassador added that current polls suggested a badly fractured society, with 48 percent opposing the return of Zelaya and 41 percent supporting his return to the Presidency. The Ambassador stated that these polls suggested that of the 41 percent supporting Zelaya's return, only 25 percent were pro-Zelaya and the rest took an institutional position against the June 28 coup. The Ambassador told Arias that the vast majority of these people supported the holding of free and fair elections and wanted the country to move forward and look beyond Zelaya and Micheletti. Both the Ambassador and Arias agreed that a frontal effort by Zelaya to stop the elections or totally discredit the process was a strategic mistake. Arias said he was considering calling Micheletti as well and making another pitch for him to agree to come to the table with an offer that would pave the way for an agreement. They agreed to speak later today or tomorrow.

Comment

15. (S) President Arias is as concerned as we are at the prospects of the collapse of the dialogue and the hard line and radical positions being taken by both sides. He believes as we do that the recent failure of the talks was in great measure due to Micheletti's and his inner circle's efforts to

scuttle the deal reached by both negotiating teams. However, he is disturbed by Zelaya's increasingly erratic state of mind reflected in his lack of empathy for his own people, his selfish focus on his own narrow interests, and his own willingness to look at the future well being of Honduras.

LLORENS